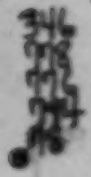
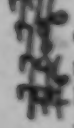
L: Herskovits E-4, 1 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
Mirebalais

Simple annual rites are held for the gods in January, each family giving small offerings in its house of worship to its own deities. These minor ceremonies are not to be confused with the extended rituals which a family may perform but once in a decade or a generation. Because of the extensive preparation and large outlay these entail, such rites are often postponed from year to year. According to some, this postponement is sought through an *action de grâce*, based on Church ritual, while others maintain that it is but necessary on his special day to appeal to the deity who is troubling the family, give a small offering — a *manger sec* — and ask for the desired respite. This may be done several times, until crop failures, sudden deaths, and the loss of valuable property begin to afflict the family, whereupon the family head seeks out a *hungan*, who by divination determines the supernatural forces that are responsible for these misfortunes; and when his statement that the gods have reached the end of their patience is confirmed independently by several other priests who are consulted, active preparations for the major rite are finally set in motion.

Any such important ceremony must be held on the ancestral habitation, and centers in the *maison de servitude*, the family house of service for the gods. The house itself, to be differentiated from the *humfort*, or "temple" of the *vodun* priest, may be elaborate or simple in accordance with the status of family members in the *vodun* cult.[9] At one end of the sacred house is a platform about two and one half feet high on which are placed calabash plates for the *loa*, six for the Créole deities, three for the Mystères Guinée, and a white plate with a "thunder stone," or Neolithic celt, and a necklace for Damballa. Not all *cailles mystères* are painted, but some, it is said, are green "for hope," and some red "for victory," while one was said to have designs of flowers and snakes painted on the wall above the platform.[9] These houses usually have two rectangular rooms, each with a separate entrance and each having its platform at the narrow end facing the doorway. One of



the rooms is consecrated to the *loa*, the other to the spirits of twins and the family dead. If the house is a large one with three rooms, the third will be for the Congo *loa*. It was also said that occasionally such places of worship reserve one room for the Rada deities, a second for the Pétro *loa*, and the third for the Congo gods, the dead and twins being worshipped elsewhere. For the Ibo gods, however, it is agreed in Mirebalais that there is never a separate room. But whether the gods are worshipped in a single-room thatched shelter or a more impressive "temple" with a metal roof, none of the major categories of supernatural powers are neglected.



In the main, large ceremonies are concerned with the task of restraining, or less often of pacifying, deities that have been molesting a family, and of making content those who have been demonstrating their goodwill toward the group. Such rites must be sharply differentiated from the ordinary *vodun* dance which, coming after the family ritual, forms but a part of this complex, and serves to express joy at the dangers averted and gratitude for the good that the friendly *loa* are to bring. At the ceremony drums may or may not be employed; at *vodun* dances they are indispensable. Possession is induced at the ceremony by the *hungan's* invocations; at the dance by the rhythm of the drums. The ceremony is attended only by members of the family and those who are specially invited; invitations to the *vodun* dance are broadcast over the countryside, and all take part in the social phases of the evening. For the ceremony, sacrifices not alone of cereals and drinks but also of the blood of animals are provided; at the *vodun* dance only minor offerings are given. And while both types of ritual are a part of a single functioning religious system, it is at the first where the most important end is achieved, that of obtaining protection from hostile gods and gaining the favor of those who are friendly.

The pattern of the ceremony — called a *service loa* — is sufficiently definite to allow a generalized version to be given.

based on the rituals that were observed. In every case at least two major officiants are necessary, the *petit assonwe* and the *houngan*, though the role of the latter is the all-important one. Last-minute preparations are made during the final morning, but what is needed will have been accumulated over a period of many months. Tables to hold offerings — sometimes two, sometimes more — are arranged at the sacred places on the family habitation, usually near streams or great trees where the gods reside. Eggs, cereals, drinks, and cornmeal — the food of the gods — are brought, and the animals to be sacrificed are tethered near by. Early in the afternoon the family, dressed in white, assemble, while the *vodun* priest with cornmeal describes on the ground the cabalistic designs called *vevers*, and he sees to it that all has its proper place on the altar, whether it be the ever-present crucifix, or the chromolithographs of the saints, or the bottles of "drink" — usually non-alcoholic — or cereals and flour of various kinds. Consecrated water must be on hand, particularly at the big "altar," as the table covered by a canopy to protect the sacred objects is called.

The first part of the ceremony is an action *de grâce*, which in Mirebalais requires an hour or more, but which is said to last two or three hours in southern Haiti. This ritual, entirely derived from the litany of the Church, must always precede any *vodun* ceremony of the kind being considered here. Its purpose is said "to set the *loa* in movement" and to notify them of the rites that are to come, but psychologically it also serves to assure the participants that they are not proceeding to the worship of African gods without having paid friendly homage to God, the ruler of the universe, and the saints. The songs and prayers are brought to a close by an *adoration*, when offerings of money are made by members of the family to pay the officiant. At this point the songs change to a more African rhythm, and the *vodun* priest takes active charge.

As darkness falls, on the first day of the rite, he summons the

loa troubling the family, or, if it is the second, those which have helped them, to tell whether or not they are willing to receive the sacrificial animals. The omen which indicates their acceptability to the gods is their nibbling at leaves or pecking at grains of corn and other cereals offered them, after which the gods themselves come, possessing their servitors. At midnight or later, as the violence of the possession recedes, the sacrifices are offered. In Mirebalais, at least, the hysteria said to mark the moment "when the blood flows" is not present. The actual killing of the animals, witnessed in numerous instances, is one of the more routine aspects of the ritual.[6]

After the animals have been killed, a long period of quiet ensues while the work of dressing and cooking them takes place, the ceremony beginning anew when this is done. If evil deities are to be banished or "restrained," they are called once more, and the priest may have to battle with those possessed by them, for these gods have no desire to be driven away, or incarcerated where they cannot escape. Most of the food given such gods is placed in large pots and buried in the earth with them, but, with characteristic human perversity, if the sacrifices have been for good *loa*, these are only allowed to have small portions. The ceremony closes with the coming of day.[7]

This pattern varies in details, and to the Haitian these differences are important. This is shown by the response of a person in whose company two similar rites were observed, to the question whether the second would resemble the first. The answer was decisive. "No, the ceremony will not be the same. In the first one the most important spirit lived in a mango tree; in the second, it is in a bamboo." The Pétro gods receive black or gray-colored animal offerings, the Rada deities white, red, and vari-colored ones. Only Bossu Trois Cornes, Pelicon, and Pelib are given bullocks, the first because he, like this animal, is horned; the second because he is even more dangerous than Bossu; and Pelib because as a water-god he will otherwise take

cattle and all other animals when the river floods. Rituals involving these larger sacrifices, however, are held only on the rarest of occasions, and are thus much less common than the ceremony which, typical of those witnessed, may now be described.

This *service* was held in a habitation southwest of Mirebalais, across the Tombe River in the foothills of the mountains. It was said to be the first ceremony of its kind given by this family, and would not have to be repeated for a generation or more. The immediate cause was the occurrence of numerous illnesses and deaths. When members independently consulted their *hungans* to discover the reason for these misfortunes, they were informed that the family *loa* demanded such a rite. Finally one priest, more powerful than the others, became possessed and described in great detail the type of ceremony that was desired: of how many days' duration, the number and kind of sacrifices, what gods were to be called, which troublesome ones must be "sent away" or "restrained," and those of the friendly *loa* who were to be fed.

The entire ritual was conducted out of doors, and at about half past four in the afternoon of Thursday, 5 July, 1934, when first seen, the action *de grâce* had already begun. It was being chanted by the *prêt' savanne*, a bespectacled, middle-aged man, who read from an old prayerbook, while the *hungan* sat quietly by. The officiant was standing in a cleared space with his back toward a grove of trees, facing the "altar." Opposite was a grassy slope, which was separated from this grove by a brook where the Malt' Source lives who watches over the habitation of the family. A white banner hung high in one of the trees a little behind the altar.

This altar, called the *trône*, was a table covered with a white cloth, spread over a frame to form a canopy sheltering its sides and back. A black cloth was beneath the white covering. Under the table a wooden bowl — a *gamelle* — contained water in which sacred leaves had been steeped; near it was a

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calabash filled with bananas, millet, rice, beans, egg-plant, and squash. On the table, under the canopy, were a crucifix and holy water, lighted white candles, a lamp of palm oil in a drinking-glass with a floating wick, food — rice cooked in milk, a stew of rice and beans, cooked chicken — and sweetened drinks — *kola*, and orange drinks among the rest, together with small drinking-glasses containing coffee. In addition, roasted and grilled corn, pineapples, fig-bananas, cassava, and sirup could be seen. Fastened to the inside of the canopy were *images*, chromolithographs depicting the saints, there being represented, among others, the Mater Dolorosa (for Emilie, in honor of those long dead), Our Mother of Perpetual Aid, St. James and St. Anthony. Some thirty feet away, under a palm tree, was another table, for Simbi, without a canopy, on which also stood various cooked and uncooked foods. Still farther away was the "first" table, the most important in the ceremony, for Bosu. It likewise held food and drink; while near it was a large fire, the all-important *boucan* for Legba. The sacrifices, tethered to trees not far from the *trône*, consisted of animals and fowls: one very large black boar, two smaller black pigs, and a black goat, a black turkey, a guinea-hen, two white pigeons, and several chickens, including a black one with ruffled feathers and a number of variegated ones.

During the Catholic-like ritual the singing, led by the *prêt' savanne*, was desultory. The members of the family, some twenty-five persons, were gathered directly in front of the *trône*. From time to time the leader, holding a lighted candle in his hand, would pour water into a small depression that had been dug directly in front of the altar. All knelt for the prayers, the Pater Noster, the Credo, the Ave Maria, and for the long *adoration* and benediction. Throughout this *action de grâce* and much of the rest of the ceremony, two women *hunsi* in white, members of the family, waved red and white banners before the *trône* or later before the table where rit-

L: Hambourbe E-4, 6 (1926) 1927 SV3 Hadd SV3
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ABOVE, *An action de grâce preceding a vodun service, where prayers of the Church are read by the priests' surname.*

BELOW, *As the vodun priest takes over, he twirls a member of the family to bring on possession.*

[facing P. 160]

ABOVE. The possessed woman offering a candle and pouring sanctified water before the altar.

BELOW. The vodun priest exhorting the possessed woman.

[facing P.161]

L: Hamburger E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 893 Hall 893
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rals were being performed. If they failed to wave their banners vigorously or often enough, the one in charge chided them for their lack of zeal, whereupon their movements would become a kind of dance. During the adoration each member of the family was called upon to give coins or candles, the first for the *petit' annonse*, though this was not his entire fee.

With the benediction, the *action de grâce* came to an end, and the solemn, tired voice of the *petit' annonse* was heard intoning a hymn, which, in the usual fashion, was repeated by the assembled group until, without interlude, without even a pause, the interpolations of the chorus gradually changed, so that the rhythm became African, and, with the transition, the vodun priest took over the leadership. The *hungan* began by repeating several times the phrase which throughout the entire ceremony was to punctuate all its climaxes, "*Goire [et] mise'corde*," and the family murmured it in response. He then ordered each member of the family to address himself to the *loa*, telling what troubles had befallen him and what favors he desired. An assistant now took six candles from the *reine*. Proceeding in a counter-clockwise direction, he described a large circle about that part of the meadow where the ceremony was to take place, fixing a candle in the ground at intervals. Four of these were for the four corners of the earth, one was for Maît' 'Bitation — the deity termed Master of the Habitation — and one for the Maît' Source — the Master of the Stream. When the members of the family, each holding a lighted candle, had formed in a line, they were bidden to place these candles in the earth within the area described by the six already there, and as they scattered over the sacred ground, little flickering flames dotted the hillside and the grassy meadow behind the *trône* in the deepening dusk.

Then all returned to the altar, and the *hungan*, taking the first of three plates made ready for him, began to describe *veves*. One plate held white cornmeal flour, one was filled with gray ashes, called Guinea flour, and the third contained

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a black powder of ground, roasted coffee beans. Starting at the tree near the "first" table for Bosu, he traced a white line that, passing the second table and the trees for Simbi, continued to the *trône*, to which subsidiary motifs were then added in gray and black, making of the designs an intricate geometric composition.

With bell in hand and a small whistle in his mouth, both of which later were entrusted to his assistants, the *hungan* went about, blowing the whistle at intervals to call the *loa*. Singing, he directed that a wooden boat-shaped basin containing water be placed in front and a little to the left of the *trône* for washing the feet of the sacrificial animals. Though all the family were present, they were again ritually summoned in song to come with the sacrifices and were ordered to stand near by with lighted candles while the animals were bathed. As they gathered, the *hungan* became possessed by Simbi, who took it upon himself to set the fee for conducting this ceremony at 117.10 gourdes. When he announced this sum, loud pleas of poverty were heard from the family, while speaking through the priest, the god bargained with them until the sum of 110 gourdes was finally agreed upon.

The *hungan* now sang a long invocation, inviting the gods of all those places where Africans live to come. First the feet of the fowl were washed, then those of the pigs, and finally of the goat. Each fowl was passed over the body and head of every member of the family as it was presented with the requisite song to the proper *loa* — the red and black cock for Legba, the black fowl for Gede, the red one for Ogun, the white for Damballa, and the fowl with ruffled plumage for Congo Zandor. Then each was placed on the ground in front of three small piles of food taken from the *trône*. They were watched with anxiety by all present, for the pecking at the food is a signal that the god accepts the animal given him. The small pigs for Ti Kita Demembré, and the boar for Bosu, were offered the same food as the fowls; the goat for Erzilie Gé Rouge was pre-

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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sented with the leaves on a branch of the sacred tree. All the animals ate, a favorable omen.

This ceremony was held during the rainy season, but the usual afternoon rains had held off. At this time, however — about eight o'clock — threatening clouds came up and soon the tropical downpour began. The heavy rain continued for more than an hour and the subsequent drizzle did not end until almost midnight, but this was not permitted to interfere with the proceedings. Now the participants took places before the "first" table, for Bosu, again with their offerings. Inasmuch as Bosu was the deity who had shown the greatest ill will toward the family, those present awaited the decision with heightened tenseness as the goat, frightened by the many people gathered about, hesitated long before he nibbled at the leaves held out to him by the *hungan*. But eventually all the animals ate, meeting this paramount test, and as each partook of the food the *hungan* several times called out "*Grâce mise'corde*," the family echoing their response with emotion. Now two men who had strong Bosu gods knelt before the table, and the fowls were again and again touched to their heads and passed over their bodies in gestures that described the sign of the cross, in order to induce their gods to come to them.

As the singing became louder and more rhythmical, various members of the family became possessed. The deities who responded to the calls were, in the order of their appearance, Kita, Erzilie, Simbi, Bosu, Damballa, and finally Gede (Papa Gedenibo). The possessions took their characteristic African form, with some of the possessed running about, jumping into the fire for Legba, and stamping on the embers with their bare feet, others reeling with arms waving, still others rolling on the ground, which, as the rain continued, soon became very muddy. Most of those under possession were women, but about nine-thirty one man became possessed by Simbi, and later another by Gede. As the *loa* "came" in ever greater

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78 79 776 number, exclamations of pleasure were heard that the gods were responding. Outwardly, the ritual seemed completely disorganized, the "*loa*" and the spectators moving, mud-bespattered, tense, from the table for Bosu to that for Simbi, and back, or to the *trône*.

533 539 78 79 534 The singing went on without interruption to the accompaniment of the bell and occasional blasts of the whistle. Among the songs heard during this period of possession were:

Bosu li join' qui chose a tè,	Bosu found something on the ground,
Pas remassé li.	Do not pick it up.
Bosu ma'ché,	Bosu goes about,
Li join qui chose a tè',	He found something on the ground,
Pas remassé li.	Do not pick it up.
Un va entrave	You will come to harm
Si ou ramassé li.	If you pick it up.
Va enragé Bosu.	You will anger Bosu.
Simbi en Deux Eaux,	Simbi en Deux Eaux
M'we fé p'ou,	I do for you,
F'e p'moin,	Do for me,
Fi-a, Congo,	Help, O Congo,
Congo Zandor.	Congo Zandor.
Simbi Kita Kita, travaille pour nous,	Simbi Kita Kita, work for us,
Jodi-a pour nous,	Today for us,
Demain pou' zott'.	Tomorrow for others.
Erzilie, o Lemba,	Erzilie, o Lemba,
M'ap' mandé coté Erzilie ye.	I ask, where is Erzilie.
Mangé a'paré.	The food is ready.
Gedenibo, derrière la croix, Gede,	Gedenibo, behind the cross, Gede.

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Devant Baron, Gede,	Before Baron, Gede,
Derrière la croix, Gede,	Behind the cross, Gede,
Jodi-a m'p' nan sang m'we,	Today I am troubled,
Gedevi, rhele Gede, ça Gede,	Gedevi, call Gede, this Gede,
Jodi-a m'pas nan sang moin.	Today I am troubled.
Balai, rousé, cerclé, quitté.	Cease to sweep, sprinkle, hoe.
Moin pas nan sang, Baron Samedi.	I am troubled, Baron Samedi.

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Shortly after eleven o'clock the *hungan* intervened to calm those possessed, for the time was at hand to give the sacrifices. Summoning the family to assemble again before the *trône* with the offerings, he commenced a long ritual in which each creature was prepared by being carefully washed and combed, while the boar for Bosu was also fastidiously perfumed and powdered. At the direction of the *hungan*, the fowls were first offered, the killing taking place at a distance of some thirty or forty feet behind the *trône*. The chickens were held with the two wings and the head in the left hand, so that the neck was exposed. The knife was passed twice over the neck to describe a cross, after which each fowl was cleanly and skillfully dispatched. One of the assistants of the *hungan* held a small calabash in which some of the blood of each animal was caught, and another, knife in hand, sang with him that they were offering this *koklo* to the deity for whom it was intended. As the last of the chickens was being killed, the *hungan* left the *trône* and quietly strangled the pigeons for Damballa.

All possessions had ceased, except that of a man "mounted" by Gede and a woman by Simbi. The man particularly attracted much attention, for Gede is known as a gossip, and so diverting were his revelations of family scandal that all were too absorbed listening to him to show any interest in the sacrifice of the animals.

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78 79 533 fice of the animals. At one point the *adjanikon* holding the calabash in which the blood was caught threw it on the ground in anger, declaring that animals should not be killed for people who were too indifferent to come and sing the songs that accompany the giving of offerings. Some of those present thereupon detached themselves and came to watch the killing of the two small pigs, as the song, repeated over and over, changed to:

[539]

O minmin, moin couteau la,	Oh, here, here is my knife,
Soso na pé tué, soso,	A pig is to be killed, a pig,
Jodi-a.	Today.

78 79 At this point several other men joined in handling the larger animals, for now the one killing the sacrifices could only hold the mouth of each beast before he cut its throat. And when the boar was to be sacrificed, even more assistance was needed, and a line of rope had to be fastened about his snout before he could be handled at all. The killing was ended when the [533] sacrificial goat was slaughtered, to the accompaniment of the [539] song:

Ma'ze Louisa,	Miss Louisa,
M'ap' tué ou jodi-a,	I kill you today,
Pour Erzilie, 'Ti Kita,	For Erzilie, 'Ti Kita,
Gé Rouge, Pié Sèche.	Gé Rouge, Pié Sèche.

The calabash containing the blood was now placed on the *trône,* while the carcasses were gathered in an orderly pile in front of it. The *hungan* described a circle about the massed bodies with cornmeal, also making two white lines in the form [465] of a cross over them. He then began to sing the *adoration* that follows every killing, while the family and all others present threw coins for him into the dish that rested on the bodies, only a few sous of which he gave to his assistants. This rite ended as the women came to him one by one, each to take a

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chicken for cleaning and cooking; the larger animals were given to the men, who carried them some distance behind the *trône* to dress them. For a time Gede continued to possess the young man, who went about talking nasally, demanding gifts and distributing rum, but all others sat quietly about, talking as they worked.

After the food was cooked, preparations were made for the concluding part of the night's ceremony, when the *loa* who had been troubling the family were to be *renvoyé* (sent away) or *borné* (restrained). Those thus "sent away" and buried were Erzilie Gé Rouge, Bosu Trois Cornes, 'Ti Kita Demembré, and 'Ti Jean Pié Sèche, while Lemba and Simbi djo (Simbi nan d'leau) were "restrained." The head, feet, intestines, heart, liver, kidneys, and some meat of each beast and fowl having been separately prepared, they were placed in proper receptacles, large jars or baskets, each of which also contained a number of needles with broken eyes, and thread. This was to give these undesirable spirits an *occupation*. For the *loa*, when buried, is told that before it may again come to harass the family it must thread the needles, and since it can never insert the thread in an eyeless needle, it can never reappear.

Preparations over, the troublesome *loa* were called to the table for Simbi, and as each entered the head of a devotee, the possessed one fought with the *hungan*, for the *loa*, not wishing to be restrained, offered stubborn resistance. "If the *hungan* had not been masterful, much evil could have happened at this time, because he had to fight three strong *loa*." When they had at last been subdued, the *hungan*, bearing a large wooden cross, walked to a place outside the habitation, where first he made *verver* and then caused a hole to be dug, in which he placed the baskets of food. As he did this he formally announced that this food was for the family's *loa* for whom there was no further need; that having given this food, the family had no further obligation toward them; and they must there-

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fore never return to trouble the living. As witness to this, he was now putting the cross in place, " which causes everything that is evil to flee," to remain until it rotted away.

Simbi djo was " restrained " where the *trône* had been; Lemba under the mango tree near the place of the table for Bosu. Some of the meat of the pigs was buried in these places with all other kinds of cooked food, and the gods were told that they were to repose there for from seven to seventeen years, after which they would again be fed. A cross of iron was buried with the cooked meat, and as each jar, both now and earlier, was put in place, this song was sung:

Poussé allé,	Get you gone,
Poussé allé,	Get you gone,
Icit pas pays ou.	This is not your country.
Ça lan Guinée,	It is Guinée,
Qui pays ou.	That is your country.

A violent rain-storm not only made it impossible to reach the place of the ceremony the following day, but also made it necessary for the family to defer all but a few of the more essential rites. The second day's ritual was thereupon put over to Saturday, when according to original intentions the *vodun* dance that had been planned to close this complex of ceremonies was to have occurred, but which in consequence was postponed until some weeks later.

The ritual of the second day of this *cérémonie* began much earlier than that of the first, for by about one-thirty in the afternoon the *action de grâce* was almost completed. As one approached, a newly dug mound of earth with a cross over it where the troublesome deities had been buried was to be seen just outside the land belonging to the family. The cross was draped with a black cloth, and was itself painted blue and white, while a rosary and a magic *garde* of native twine were suspended from it.

On this afternoon the ritual was performed in two places, a

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spot somewhat farther down the stream than the site of the earlier ceremony, and later at the family habitation on the hill. There was one table arranged as a *trône* and under its canopy, beside the *images*, the candles, and the crucifix, were white foods such as rice and white beans. Instead of Pétro *loa*, this time the ceremony was to bring Rada gods who were to be asked for children, good health, and good fortune. The *trône* was just below the confluence of two brooks, near some great palm trees. Near by was a weir, while in the larger stream, below the point of juncture, were two small natural pools.

When the *action de grâce*, which did not differ from that witnessed earlier, was ended, the *hungan* again made his *vervet*, and these were yet richer in design than on the previous occasion. As he finished he took a number of the women of the family by the right hand, spinning each in turn several times to induce possession. The *loa* Damballa Siligwe "came" almost at once, possessing a woman who threw herself into the stream, threshing about as a "serpent." No one troubled himself to attend to her, however, as she emerged and walked about in her wet clothes behind the *trône* and in front of it, so that, according to the *hungan*, the *loa* became angry and would not come, thus making it necessary to sing many more songs of praise and entreaty. As he sang, the *hungan* seized one member of the family after another by the hand, spinning them about and making them kneel before the *trône* to bring the *loa*.

Moin dit Gran',	I say, Gran',
Bonjou', Gran',	Good-day, Gran',
Bonjou', bonjou'.	Good-day, good-day.
Enfants, la yo, Gran',	It is their children, Gran',
Qui ap mandé coumen nous ye-e,	Who ask how you are,
Enfants yo	Their children
Qui ap dit bonjou'.	Who say good-day.

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Damballa Wedo,	Damballa Wedo,
Papa, nan pié boi',	Papa, in the tree,
Moin pa' pe' monté.	I cannot climb.
Papa ou c'é' coulev',	Papa, you are a serpent,
Papa ou c'é' Dagowe.	Papa, you are Dagowe.
Damballa Siligwe, Anvalou,	Damballa Siligwe, Anvalou,
Nous salué ou.	We salute you.
Ça nous dit,	What do you say,
Alada Sisigwe?	Alada Sisigwe?
Papa Damballa moin,	Papa Damballa mine,
Signalé nous,	Show us,
Signalé nous Dahomey.	Show us Dahomey.
Nous acé! Nous acé!	We are here! We are here!
Papa Ogun qui met' pié	Papa Ogun who enters
Nan humfort.	The *humfort*
Ago, ago-e!	*Ago, ago-e!*
Kadia Bosu,	Kadia Bosu,
Nous acé,	We are here,
Kadia Bosu.	Kadia Bosu.

These songs failed to bring the gods, and the mother of the girl who had been possessed was sternly commanded to take her up the hill to the house and dress her in clean dry clothes. Before she could return, another young woman who, it was later learned, was a member of the family from the region of Grand Bois, some distance away, came running down the hill possessed by Damballa. Crying out for more room, she ordered those sitting near the *trône* to move on as she roughly pulled others toward her. Now the *loa* came rapidly, with six or seven immediate possessions; and even one reluctant girl who stood by nervously, hesitating to soil the fresh white dress trimmed in blue which she, like the other women of the family, was wearing, was soon "mounted" by her *loa*.

1; Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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Once again the *hungan* made *verver* and, as he did so, the woman possessed by Damballa, leaping across the brook, climbed into a calabash tree, holding to the near-by palm fronds for support as she shook the tree to punctuate her shouted directions and demands. As she climbed higher and higher, the *hungan* pleaded: "Go no further, Papa. Climb no further," but to no avail. By this time it was after four o'clock, and since this day the rains did not delay, the *hungan* entreated her to descend from the tree, to permit him and the others assembled there to go up the hill out of the downpour. Wooing the "*loa*" with song, he urged:

Verver ci mè' a tè,	Here is *verver* on the ground,
Pinga cé'émonie moin,	Take heed of my ceremony,
Shango, ago-e!	Shango, *ago-e!*

While he sang, he made *verver* about the base of the tree on which the woman was standing and along the bank of the stream. But he still had no success, for she persisted with much violence to recount the wrong that had been done by the family to provoke the anger of the gods — how one member had bargained with a *hungan* to induce him to send evil *loa* to the other members of the family, that they might die and his inheritance might be the greater. Before she would consent to descend, all the sacrifices had to be brought for her inspection, and all those possessed were required to go up the hill and dress in clean clothes. Returning in the rain, the freshly dressed women gathered about the base of the tree, exhibiting the sacrificial animals to the *loa*, the chickens held high in the hands of their donors, and the goats and sheep prominently placed. Slowly, very slowly, as the downpour continued, the woman began to descend, and many times she hesitated, so that it was more than ten minutes before she reached the ground.

But even after she was on the ground and the *hungan* was

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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preparing to seek shelter from the rain, new possessions continued, until, saying: "The *loa* are greater than I am," he went on with the ceremony, singing:

Ossange Damballa Wedo, *Laissé coulé, Ossange-o!* *Ai-bobo!*	Ossange Damballa Wedo, Permit coiling, Ossange! *Ai-bobo!*
Moin entré, *M'ap salué loa.*	I enter, I salute the *loa.*
Ogun, Ogun Achade, *O, Ogun Achade,* *Hier soir Ogun fai' yun rêvé'-o* *Rêvé' li tourné lègèdé.*	Ogun, Ogun Ashade, O, Ogun Ashade, Last night Ogun dreamed a dream-o Dreamed he turned a spy.

A woman became possessed by Damballa, as did the young man who had "had" Gede the preceding night of the ceremony; the woman was in a gay mood, going about smiling and laughing, while the man threw himself in the water and rolled like a snake. And since the *loa* were coming so strongly, the *hungan* began the ceremony of washing and presenting the sacrificial animals, which this time included two white male goats, one very large and one smaller, a white sheep, and six or seven fowls of various colors. The presentation made, the entire group marched singing up the path to the houses, the flag-bearers saluting with their banners the woman so happy in her possession.

As the procession came up the hill, it passed a newly built small house, intended to serve as the family place of worship for the *loa* now introduced into the habitation, and a framework of brush, or *tonnelle*, that had been erected as a shelter under which the postponed *vodun* dance was to have taken place. Without pausing, they proceeded slowly to the gate-

1: Herskovits E-4, 6 (1936) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

way, where a ceremony was held for Legba, the guardian of entrances, that he might permit the other *loa* to pass.

At the direction of the *hungan*, the bars of the gateway were let down as prayers, the Pater Noster and the Ave Maria, were said. Then he sang:

Papa Legba,	Papa Legba,
Fé ou gagné patience	Have patience
Pou' ou service.	At your *service.*
Ago, ago-é!	*Ago, ago-é!*
Papa Legba,	Papa Legba,
Sorti lan Guinée,	Come from Guinea,
Pou' nou' passé.	That we may pass.

As this song and others of similar tenor were sung, the man who had been first possessed by Gede, and earlier in the afternoon by Damballa, strode shouting along the path beside the entrance, into the near-by fire, which was made the hotter as several men blew on it and poured rum into the flames; he stamped in it until he was seized and calmed. The *hungan* once more began to make *verver*, this time at the gateway, as he sang:

Papa Legba,	Papa Legba,
Na pé mandé,	We ask you,
Ça wé la?	What do you see there?
Adoré-é-o	We worship, oh,
A-i bobo!	*A-i bobo!*
Papa Legba,	Papa Legba,
Ouvri barrière pou' nou', ago-ye!	Open the gateway for us, *ago-ye!*
Ouvri chemin pou' moin.	Open the path for me.

As he sang, he passed the red and black cock for Legba over the body of the possessed man sitting in a chair, who thereupon resumed his excited movements, reeling along the path

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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and from time to time again tramping in the fire, as these songs were heard:

Legba cuiscuignon,	Legba who limps along,
À la longtemps,	It is a long time
Moin pas wé 'ou.	I have not seen you.
Papa Legba, wé!	Papa Legba, look!
L'ouvri barrière pou' nous passé.	Open the gateway that we may pass.
E-ago-ye!	*E-ago-ye!*
Legba chita lan barrière	Legba who sits on the gate
Ba nou' passé.	Give us the right to pass.
Ago-ye-e!	*Ago-ye-e!*

The chicken was also passed over other members of the family, but without bringing on any new possessions, and was several times presented on both sides of the entrance-way, wings outstretched, the *hungan* occasionally half-kneeling. Finally stepping inside the entrance, he wrung the neck of the animal, which was destined later to be roasted and to hang for several days over the gateway. While the *loa* Legba was dancing in the fire, Gran' Erzilie " came to the head " of a woman who, after violent possession and a great deal of pacing back and forth in company with " Legba," went down on her knees. Still another woman became possessed, by Damballa, and rolled in the mud. Another procession, for the return to the *tonnelle,* was formed as a lilting song was sung, with everyone dancing to it. " Legba," walking backwards, led the way, calling out: " This way, Papa, come this way." The one possessed by Gran' Erzilie followed on her knees, while, some distance behind, " Damballa " rolled from side to side as she moved her body face-downward along the path. After a few moments the woman on her knees began to beat the ground rhythmically as she proceeded, and as " Damballa " caught up with her, she beat this rhythm on the thighs and buttocks

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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of the other. Arrived at the *tonnelle*, both were finally induced to come to their feet, to be immediately sent away and freshly dressed.

Inside the family shrine, on the ground at the right hand as one entered, were the articles of food and drink that usually constitute a "dry" offering, or *mangé sec*— rolls, cassava, cakes, grilled maize, coffee grounds, sirup, and bowls of corn-meal called *acconsan*, with water. The *hungan* made more *vever* just inside this door to honor the gods that were to be worshipped here, as the "ceremony of the sheep," a sacrifice for the Rada *loa* named St. John the Baptist, was begun. A table was placed under the *tonnelle*, and a container of water in which the animal was first washed. He was then made to stand on the table, where a fresh white table-cloth had been spread, while he was combed, powdered, and perfumed. A piece of white cotton cloth was tied about the horns of the animal, and a lighted white candle was held in place on the right horn or at times between the horns by an attendant. While a song honoring Damballa Wedo was sung, the *hungan* went into the small house to care for the two women, who were still in a state of possession. He set them dancing inside and after a few minutes they were led forth by "Legba," each to pour water and to light a candle before the sheep. The two goats were next washed and "dressed," white cloths and soft beeswax candles also being twisted about their horns. Other offerings under the *tonnelle* were a white pigeon for Damballa and a red cock for Ogun.

Each member of the family now took the fowl or animal that was his offering, as all were summoned inside the shrine, where final directions were given regarding the disposal of the sacrifices, and invocations were spoken to the gods. After this they came out, placing the animals before the men who were waiting to see to the killing, which was carried out in a manner even more matter-of-fact than on the first night of the ceremony. By this time it was about half past six o'clock, and

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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night had fallen. As before, the men addressed themselves to the task of butchering the animals, the women to that of preparing and cooking the fowls.

It was perhaps five o'clock in the morning before all the food was made ready to serve. The *hungan*, who had been taking a well-deserved rest, was called, and prepared a plate for each *loa*. After giving every member of the family a dish, he arranged them in two rows before the small house of worship, himself heading the group, attended by two *hunsi* with white and red candles and sacred water. First reciting the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, and the Credo, he announced to the Rada *loa* that their food was ready and that they were invited to come and partake of it. As he said this, each person entered the house as directed, to place the plate he carried on the table, where a cloth, knives, forks, spoons, and condiments already had been arranged. Many members of the family became possessed, an excellent omen that the Rada *loa* were eagerly coming to partake of the offerings. The head of the goat was placed on the floor, the roasted cock was hung above the gate leading to the habitation. Then the door of the house of worship was closed that the *loa* might eat undisturbed, and for several hours people sat quietly by. Finally the *hungan* knocked at the door to announce his entrance and asked if the *loa* had finished. He then called the family to come and eat what the gods had left, and by ten o'clock that morning, everything was consumed.

J. Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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CHAPTER X

VODUN WORSHIP: THE DANCE

THE *vodun* dance, the most public aspect of Haitian peasant ritual, has been more frequently observed and reported on than any other rites of the cult. The worship of the *loa* by an individual, the baptism of his *loa*, and the minor periodic sacrifices he makes to it that it may protect him are entirely private in nature, while presence at the *service* for the *loa* is essentially restricted to members of the family. The *vodun* dance, however, is viewed quite differently, for news of it is widely spread by word of mouth, so that, in contrast to the private character of all other rituals, *vodun* dances are important social occasions, and their success is measured by the numbers in attendance and the enthusiasm of the participants which makes a dance *chaud'* — "hot"!

The *vodun* dance may be said to function in several ways. Above all, it is an integral part of the worship of the *loa*, and as such is marked by repeated possessions which indicate the presence of the gods. Yet it also offers an important opportunity for recreation, as is indicated by the fact that in Mirebalais the term *bamboche*, which means a dance at which one merely enjoys oneself, is often applied to it. By no means do all who go to a dance become possessed, for of one hundred to one hundred and fifty persons present, no more than twenty or twenty-five will come under the power of their gods. The old

1: Herskovits E-4, 5 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3 Mirebalais

tion is a further comment both upon the human traits ascribed to them, and upon the realism with which they take cognizance — as only African gods can — of the financial position of their devotees!

It is not only in the immediacy of the Haitian gods to their worshippers and in their human qualities, however, that these beings have retained African traits, for in the full reciprocity that must prevail in the relationship between deities and their followers is to be seen a point of view that is entirely non-European. Between man and the gods the rule of *quid pro quo* must always be in operation; and this rule may only be regarded as but another contribution of Africa toward Haitian religious ideology. While this reciprocal giving flavors all aspects of worship whether it be of the *loa*, the dead, or the twins, it takes a yet more prominent, and more familiar place in the field of magic, since here the *engagement* owes much to European belief, though the element of reciprocity is much more emphasized than was ever the case in medieval European diabolism.

The psychological values of the *vodun* cult, especially the general tone found in the feeling toward the terms *Guinée* or *Rada*, perhaps most convincingly show the attitudes that aided in the retention of things recognizably African. For while the Pétro gods are by no means viewed as altogether bad, or are always held unwelcome, the fact that in Mirebalais, as in Haiti generally, the Rada gods are those least feared, most desired, and in connection with whose cult wrongdoing is most rarely present, is of the greatest significance, especially when the related fact is recalled that the Pétro gods are the more powerful in the matter of evil magic, while the Rada deities are said to exert their power to protect their devotees from the dark forces that may be set in motion against them.

In attitudes toward the gods, then, in the names of the gods themselves, in the manner in which they function in the lives of Haitians, and in the importance of the ceremonial con-

1: Herskovits E-4, 8 (1934) 1937 SV3 Haiti SV3
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with the purely Catholic rituals carried on at the village church, are seen to hold an important if unofficial place in the complex of rites known in the Haitian Church calendar as the Fête of Saut d'Eau.

During the two or three days preceding the fête and on the fifteenth of July itself, an air of great gayety not unlike the carnival spirit accompanying European Church festivals pervades the surrounding country. Camions traverse the almost impassable side road, bringing crowds of people from Port-au-Prince, from the Dominican border, and even from the north, who throng the streets and the shrines and tramp the miles from the village to the waterfalls or visit the nearer sacred sites of St. John's Wood and En bas Palmes, to light candles and ask the satisfaction of their needs. Like the falls themselves, these spots by their very beauty awaken a sense of emotional awareness, and it is not strange that here, as at the falls, many possessions occur. At night, in particular, the great trees with their interlacing serpent-like roots, the gaping earth which at En bas Palmes is witness to the uprooting of the palm trees where the miracle occurred, and the stream of sacred water, all make a scene of indescribable eeriness, heightened by the flickering candles given as offerings, and the open lamps of those who stay the night here to fulfill their vows.

In the town itself gambling and other games go on, and dances of all kinds are held at night, among them *vodun* and *bal*, though at these public dances no possessions are countenanced. One of the most colorful aspects of the scene is the *penitants*, wearing clothing of varied colors in fulfillment of a request by the *loa* they worship or an obligation to them. Such folk are not permitted in church unless the clothing which marks them is covered by ordinary dress, but they walk the streets, often possessed and often using their power to heal those whom they encounter. Possessions by Ogun, by Gede, by Baron Samedi, by Damballa, by Ezilie and other *vodun* deities were observed, particularly at the shrines, where their

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1965) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

one seed from that tomato would ever take root under the hot sun. Some time later, when I knew this man well, I talked to him about the care with which seeds must be planted if they are to grow properly. I told him how *we* grew *our* tomatoes. He listened carefully, nodding his head. When I had finished he said: "Yes, that must be a good way to do things in your country. But here in this valley God is good. He does not forget his children. From the broken tomato many plants will sprout. When God is good to you, you do not have to count the seeds." I suggested that perhaps one should not waste any of the precious seeds that God had provided; and to this he replied: "How is there waste? My garden is made to flourish by Zaka [the country man's special deity]. Some people give Zaka a feast every year, but between times they forget. Zaka helps me in my work, and I don't forget him. When I break the tomato and put it on the ground that way, it is a little taste for Zaka. Whatever I plant, I give him some. He is good to me, I am good to him."

What I learned from many incidents like this one was that the eye does not always see correctly. The old man was not just planting tomatoes, nor was he performing a conventionalized ritual act. It was a highly personalized act of faith in nature and confidence in the deity who shared his work.

A large part of this book deals with Vodoun, the religious practices based on West African traditions. One soon discovers that the songs and dances of Vodoun ritual are not merely music and motion supplementing and decorating more serious affairs. Virtually every aspect of Vodoun ritual is placative or invocational. The songs that are sung and the dances that are danced are direct supplication of various supernatural forces.

Undoubtedly, a number of principles which are put forward in this study do not apply equally to every region of Haiti; but they are, I think, true in general terms. Not until one has accepted the fact that different explanations exist for given phenomena, that the same rites are performed in different fashion in different places, and that the cult priests themselves do not agree on many details, may one begin to work toward a general view of the Haitian scene.

All of Haitian life is not Vodoun. And there are of course some Haitians who are relatively outside the central circle of its influence. But the inner meanings of Vodoun and its relationship to the total view of life permeate the entire scene. Music, too, binds together practically the entire fabric of Haitian existence. It is essential not only to the cult temple but to countless workaday activities. Agrarian work groups often perform their tasks to the accompaniment of a drum. And in the cult temple, the iron hoe of the fields often serves as a percussion instrument.

The Drum and the Hoe is the result of studies made over a period of

2: Courlander B-S (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

in the services. In the court, the bases of four sacred trees . . . are surrounded by circles of masonry [low brick walls]. These *reposoirs* are inhabited by the *loa* Legba, Ogoun, Loco and Sauge.[5]

There is little in Aubin's description to suggest that hounfors were much different a half century ago from what they are today. He errs in identifying the "thunder stones" solely with Damballa. But his eye for detail was acute. In 1950 a mambo in the neighborhood of this hounfor described by Aubin affirmed that some of the loa stones and old coins which he mentioned are still to be found among the properties of a hounfor in the Cul-de-Sac Plain. Others were lost in one of the cleric-inspired raids which despoiled cult temples of drums and other paraphernalia about fifteen years ago.

Many services are held outside the hounfor and the peristyle. Some rituals, such as animal sacrifices and "talking to the loa below the water," may take place some distance from the cult buildings. Indeed, various Vodoun ceremonies may be held at waterfalls, at the seashore, in sacred groves, in ordinary homes, in a boat at sea,[6] or under a sacred tree.

The rites of the hounfor are almost without number. They are associated with the supplication or conciliation of virtually countless deities, each of which has his own special service. There are services in multitudinous combinations and permutations for the dead, for twins, for albinos, and for unborn children. There are ceremonies for the elevation of hounsi and for initiation, smoke and fire ordeals, and tests of other kinds. There are *mangé loa* (feasts for the deities) and *mangé morts* (feasts for the dead). There are services for the sick, for the crops, and for the harvest. In one context or another, Vodoun relates to nearly every aspect and phase of life—and its counterpart, death. Since every region, every locality, and, in fact, almost every hounfor has developed its own ritual out of the common materials, it is possible to see hundreds of ceremonies without ever seeing precisely the same one twice. Yet the common elements bind them all together.

One such prime element is the possession, the "mounting" of the human body by one of the deities. Possession is a psychological phenomenon common to the rites of many cults throughout the world. It is known in Asia, Africa, Europe, and America. It is not the unique property of the African and his Haitian descendant. In the United States it is a commonplace not only among certain Negro cults but certain white cults as well. The United States Negro had ample West African inspiration for his seizures in the church and at the baptism. The intellectual meaning of these seizures has changed, as have their outward forms to a measurable extent, but their emotional content has not altered.

[5] Translated from the French of Aubin, En Haiti, pp. 59-59. Cf. P. 349, Category 116 -- Analyst
[6] [Footnote appears on P. 349, Category 116 -- Analyst]

2: Courlander p-5 (1937-1958) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

ing Boyer's administration, 1818–1843, Catholicism was the state religion but the president was its chief. Leyburn notes:

> Every effort of the state failing to provide proper religious leadership, Boyer resigned himself to permitting those who professed to be priests to practice in the republic. There were seventy so-called priests in the country in 1840. Some of them had once been in the holy orders but had been unfrocked: they found in Haiti not only a haven but a fertile field for gain. In addition to these religious renegades came adventurers who knew just enough of ritual and theology to use the priestly garb as a cover for easy graft. . . . They baptized houses, boats, and doorposts, and blessed fetish charms or amulets, all for a fee.[9]

It was not until 1860, after the death of the "Emperor" Soulouque, that Haiti signed a concordat with the Roman Church.

The role of the prêt' savane became defined after the slave revolts of 1791. His cue was taken from the activities of freebooting Europeans who apparently needed neither religious orders nor profound Catholic knowledge for their pseudo-clerical work. And the long period without a responsible priesthood gave the "bush priest" an opportunity to flourish.

The prêt' savane of today has a respected place in the community, though his prestige is not so great as that of the houngan on the one hand or the Catholic priest on the other. His place is guaranteed by his ability to bring to the Vodoun service elements of a competing system which the houngan, operating within the framework of African tradition, does not provide. Acceptance of these Catholic elements as a peripheral part of Vodoun is characteristic of much West African religious thinking, in which new deities and rituals may be added to the old when circumstances require.

The prêt' savane opens many Vodoun services with an *action de grâce*, reads prayers when a death has occurred, participates in marriage rites, and "baptizes" the hounfor, the cult drums, and the sacred rattles—not to mention the loa themselves! But it is the houngan's powers that are paramount. The "bush priest" is in a sense performing a service for the Vodoun priest, whose rituals and administrations are regarded as the effective and vital ones. The prêt' savane is a cultural afterthought.

In certain remote and isolated mountain places the prêt' savane is virtually unknown. But there is no sense of deprivation, for the cult priests —even the poorest and the most rustic—have their own way of dealing with the saints, God, and the forces of nature. An aged houngan of the Morne la Selle region explained it this way:

"In everything that is done, God's permission is asked first. Most houngans in the mountains do not know how to read, and they don't know how to pray. But they know many things. They know where the sun rises,

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

793 78 [illegible] 076 794 184 78

They know where the sun rises,

and they address St. Nicholas, who opens the day, and they know the wish of God. In the name of St. Nicholas they raise a glass of water and ask God for the power to do."

In ordinary usage the Haitian refers to the various cults or "nations" as though they were quite separate and mutually exclusive. He speaks of the *service* Pétro, or *rite* Nago, or the *nanchon* Ibo. Yet in practice the cults are usually bound together into two or three major groups.

The "nations" belonging to the Vodoun (or Dahomey) group include the Arada or Dahomé, the Anago, the Mahi, the Amine, and the Ibo. There is ample evidence that the cults of these "nations" were once separate and apart. Even today in isolated regions of Haiti there are cult centers devoted exclusively to Nago deities. Elsewhere, Mahi or Ibo services are held without the intrusion of "foreign" rites and deities. Some cult centers have several hounfors—one for Dahomé, one for Nago, one for Ibo, and so on, with a separate building for the "dead" spirit Gèdé. More often, however, one finds a single hounfor containing separate altars. Of all the "nations" within the Vodoun group, the Ibo perhaps has the most independent status, and in some regions it is tied in with Pétro rather than Vodoun rites.

The Pétro group also includes numerous "nations," some completely absorbed, others more loosely affiliated. Within this group, which for convenience may be called the Congo-Guinée family, are the Pétro, Bumba, Moundongue, Bambarra, Congo Loangue (Loango), and other "nations." In certain regions the Congo cult, like the Ibo, is regarded as separate and apart. Sometimes the Pétro service is kept distinct from the others, though it has drawn so heavily on them for its roster of deities that the distinction is not easily seen. In places such as Port-au-Prince where the cults have deeply infiltrated one another, major differences between the Vodoun and Congo-Guinée rites have disappeared, and altars to both Pétro and Dahomé deities may be found within the same hounfor.

It is not difficult to detect a certain pattern of regional grouping within the Vodoun and Congo-Guinée families. Within the Vodoun family are gathered "nations" from Dahomey, Togoland, and Nigeria, while in the Congo-Guinée cycle are "nations" from Central Africa, miscellaneous "nations" such as the Bambarra, and the Pétro cult which is regarded as "Haitian" rather than "African," but whose rites and loa have been recruited in large measure from other services.

One often hears of Kitta services, or Chango services, or Legba rites. These are not separate cults but simply rituals for specific loa.

2: Courlander B-8 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

of the Catholic Church and fused with old folk beliefs of Europe. In Dahomey, which was the wellspring for much of Haiti's culture, there was no supreme deity quite like the one introduced to the slaves by the missionaries. There was a pantheon of gods with Mawu and Lisa at the top. They were children of a common parent, Nananbuluku. None of these deities was strictly comparable to our idea of a supreme being. Nananbuluku survives in Haiti as Nananbouclou or Nananbélécou, one of many loa. Among the neighboring Yoruba the high god was Olorun. Like the Dahomean Mawu and Lisa, Olorun was quite remote from the lives of men. The gods who were invoked and placated were the several hundred *orisha* created by Olorun. The nearby Ashanti people had a simpler pantheon, with the sky god Nyame supreme among them.

In the present Haitian concept of the supernatural, God is at the very apex of the pantheon, though he is distinctly of another order. His power as the supreme source of all things is fully recognized. A Haitian song, associated with Vodoun ritual but of probable recent origin, goes:

C'est Bondieu qui voyé moin, quand li vlé moin l'apprend. [Ex. 37]
It is God who sent me, when he wants me he'll take me.

Another song, from the Guinée service, goes:

Oh, Kitta, oh so'tí nan dleau, li tout mouillé!
Oh, nen point houngan passé Bondieu nan pays-ya! [Ex. 36]

Oh, Kitta comes out of the water, he is dripping wet!
Oh, there is no houngan in this country greater than God!

Although it is recognized, or at least stated, that God is a supreme force, God is not regarded as the entire supernatural force of the world. In many Vodoun services the houngan may invoke, as separate categories of the unseen, the loa, the dead, the *marassas* (twin spirits), and God. Haitians do not have a consistent schematized picture of the supernatural world. God comes first, but (as in West Africa) he is less immediate than the loa. He is identified with destiny; yet within the framework of that destiny man's lot can be bettered or worsened through dealings with the dead, the baka and lou-garos (demons and vampires), and the cult priests.

In many of the folk tales of Haiti, God appears as another character in a cast which may include as protagonists animals, loa, Christian saints, and ordinary men and women. One such tale is about a visit which all the dogs decided to pay to God. They started off through the woods together, but one of them was distracted by the smell of carrion. He left his friends for a brief time, found the carrion, and ate some of it. Then he hurriedly joined his companions again. Together they came to God's house and were admitted to the parlor, where they sat around making polite conver-

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

tempo. The chorus and leader sing responsively, their parts overlapping in traditional African style. The shoulder movements, foot movements, the way the arms are carried, and the typical posture of feet flat on the ground, bent knees, and swayed back—all are of African derivation. These postures and movements are broad and direct. There are few of the decorative and "fine" movements that one sees in the dances of Indonesia, Cambodia, and India. Where the Javanese lays stress on the pose of the hands and the delicate movements of the fingers, the Haitian dancer is concerned with the position of the arms and the motions of the shoulders. The Indonesian sense of poised balance or suspended movement is absent. In its place there is an attitude of strong frontal assault against natural forces such as gravity, or direct submission to those forces. There is almost always a feeling of solidity and stability in Haitian posture, and of a proximity between the body and the earth, but the total effect is dynamic. Indonesian dancing seems to express a comprehension of the unseen and the supernatural; Haitian dancing seems to express an intimate understanding of nature.

Dancing touches on virtually every aspect of life in Haiti. It plays a part in the supplication of loa, the placation of the dead, and the making of magic; in the consecration of a hounfor, the installation of a houngan, and the initiation of cult members; in planting, harvesting, and house-building. Catholic Church holidays, Nine Nights, baptisms, the election of a new president, and ordinary social gatherings—all are celebrated, in part, at least, by dancing.

Haitian dancing is participative rather than exhibitionistic. It is to join rather than to watch. There are some dances, however, which require special skills, and a few which are highly individualistic. Several types of dances are described elsewhere in this book. Verbal description cannot do justice to an art such as dancing, of course; but some brief sketches may help to suggest the differences between one Haitian dance and another.

In the Congo Mazonne, for example, men and women pair off and dance face to face, making contact occasionally but only briefly. The arms are stretched forward as though to embrace the partner around the waist, but the actual embrace never materializes. The partners dance sometimes as though they are unaware of each other and are simply part of a larger group; then they approach, move as mirrored reproductions, and separate. Loin movement is free, and there is a restrained sexual intensity, though direct sexual implications are not necessarily present. Sometimes the woman holds the hem of her skirt in her hands, while the man holds his jacket open toward his partner.

2: Courlander B-5 (1937-1955) 1960 SV3 Haiti SV3

Rara season two special rattles are used. One of them is made of metal and resembles a tin can with a wooden handle. The metal sometimes is perforated with numerous small holes, and inside are *hoholi* seeds, which act as rattlers. This instrument, known as a *tchancy*, is usually decorated with colorful ribbons when in use. (In northern Haiti the term *tchancy* is used to designate metal wrist rattles worn by drummers.) The other Rara rattle, called *jouconjou* or *joucjou*, is made of three gourds carried on a long pole. One of the gourds is affixed to the end of the pole, and the others are fastened to the terminals of a short crossbar, giving the effect of a cross with bulbous ends. Since many of the Rara processions are dramatizations of the Christ epic, the instrument could be interpreted as a Christian symbol, though its conversion into a noisemaker appears to be an African conception. The *jouconjou* may be a variant of the small rattle-cross which is used by the Abakwa secret society in Cuba.[5]

The sacred gourd rattle of the cult priest is called *asson* or *baksor*. It is pear-shaped and covered with a network of beads which act as external strikers. It is used by the houngan to summon the spirits of the dead, to praise or call upon the deities, and to accompany the performance of magic. The asson is of West African derivation, and its counterparts are to be found among the cults of Martinique, Trinidad, Cuba, Brazil, Venezuela, and elsewhere where African traditions have left their mark. The gourds from which the assons are made are grown in a special grove sacred to the loa.

A large calabash rattle has been reported from several isolated regions of Haiti, primarily from the north. Some rattles of this kind have been described as more than twenty inches in height and covered by a network of external strikers, usually wari beans. The calabash rattles are used in groups of three. They are shaken and thumped against the palm of the hand, producing both deep and high-pitched sounds. These oversize rattles are employed without drums and are said to be associated with Arada-Nago rites. They appear to be a survival of the instrument known among the Yoruba as the *shèkèrè* and are found in Cuba in both Dahomey and Lucumí (Yoruba) cult centers.

Probably one of the oldest of Haitian folk instruments is the earth bow, known as the *tambour maringouin*, or mosquito drum. Traditionally the mosquito drum is made in the following way:

A hole is dug in the earth, perhaps a foot or more deep. It is covered with palm or banana bark, which is pegged firmly all around. A cord is attached to the center of the bark membrane and drawn taut to a bent green sapling, one end of which is buried in the ground at a slight angle. The cord is plucked and snapped with the fingers of one hand, while

5 [See Courlander, "Musical Instruments of Cuba," Musical Quarterly, April, 1942, pp. 233-234. Cf. p. 354, Category 116. -- Analyst]

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Notes

Chapter 1: *The Making of the Haitian* (pp. 1-7)

[1]The name Ganda survives in Haiti as the name of a deity.

[2]Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past* (p. 47), provides a tabulation of raw data found in the manifests recorded for slaves shipped to Virginia between 1710 and 1769: 20,564 slaves were reported shipped from "Africa," 3,652 from Gambia, 6,777 from "Guinea," 9,224 from Calabar, 3,860 from Angola, and 1,011 from Madagascar. Of those shipped from the island of Madagascar, 473 were listed as coming from Mozambique.

[3]Bartolomé de Las Casas.

Chapter 2: *Man and the Universe: Vodoun* (pp. 8-18)

[1]See Courlander, *Haiti Singing*, p. 7.

[2]Schweinfurth in *The Heart of Africa*, II, 31, says: "In Loango all exorcists and conjurors are called *ganga*." Leo Wiener, in *Africa and the Discovery of America* (Philadelphia: Innes and Sons, 1922), III, 32, reports: "Forms of *ganga* have in Bantu the meaning 'medicine' but also 'magic'—such as Nyika *ganga* and Kongo *nganga*."

[3]Gorer, *Africa Dances*, p. 120; Herskovits, *Dahomey*, II, 208 ff.

[4]From the Fon *houn-su* or *houn-su*. Among the Arada of Dahomey a *houn-su* was regarded as a spiritual wife of the deity. She was a servant of the cult temple, and in some instances a wife of the cult priest.

[5]Translated from the French of Aubin, *En Haiti*, pp. 57-59.

[6]Deren, in her *Divine Horsemen* (pp. 119 ff.), gives an excellent report of a service for Agwé in a boat at sea. Aubin (*op. cit.*, p. 108) seems to have given the first description of this service at sea for the loa Agwé.

[7]Leyburn, *The Haitian People*, p. 119.

[8]*Ibid.*, p. 123. Leyburn advances the theory that Vodoun developed during this period as a result of the vacuum left by the Church. Although the Church did in effect leave the field to the African cults, one must assume that the Arada, Congo, and other cults were already organized and possessed of great vitality before the Haitian revolution. Implicit evidence points to a continuity of cult life from the earliest days of the African on Haitian soil. There are no statistics to reveal the extent of cult membership at the end of the eighteenth century, but the content and form of Vodoun today are so overwhelmingly African that it is difficult to think of Haitian cult activity as the product of a renaissance.

Chapter 3: *The Loa: Gods of the Haitian Mountains* (pp. 19-29)

[1]The term *vodoun*, used in this precise sense, conforms to the original Fon (Dahomean) usage. The term *hounsi*, also of Fon origin, signifies "spirit" and belongs to the same root